# Debating Europe in the Czech Republic: the "reluctant Europeans"?

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Since the mid-1990s, the Czech Republic has been portrayed as one of the most Eurosceptic countries in Central and Eastern Europe - mainly because one of its major politicians, Václav Klaus, is known for his sharp criticism of the European Union (EU). Expressing reluctance towards some aspects of European integration is not however restricted to the Czech President and ambiguous party positions on this issue have become commonplace in the Central European Countries (CECs) in the 1990s. Three phases can be distinguished in the debates about European affairs in the CECs since the fall of communism: a broad consensus in favour of the "return to Europe" in 1989-1990 was followed by dissensions about European integration in the mid-1990s, as new competitors emerged in the political sphere and unpopular socio-economic reforms were justified by the preparation for EU accession. The last period, starting with the launching of the accession negotiations in 1998, saw the success of "Eurorealism," that is support for the principle of European integration and disapproval of the accession conditions offered to the CECs. After 2004, many parties kept expressing ambivalent positions on specific policies, on relations between member states or on the use of the EU budget.

The literature on party positions on European integration has been structured by two main research questions in Western as well as Central Europe in the late 1990s: explaining "Euroscepticism" and measuring the "Europeanization" of national political systems. Following Taggart's influential article, the literature on Euroscepticism deals with "contingent or qualified opposition, as well as [...] outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration" (Taggar 1998). It highlights the institutional (marginal position in the political system, opposition to the government) and the ideological (nationalism, xenophobia, economic protectionism) dimensions of Euroscepticism. The scientific debate centres around a ideology-versus-strategy dichotomy (Harmsen and Spiering, 2004; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2005; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008). Although writers on each side of the argument accept that both set of factors interact in reality (Batory 2002; Batory and Sitter 2004), some authors consider that critical approaches to European integration mainly derive from the parties'

origins, ideologies and identities (Kopecký and Mudde 2002), while others stress positions in the party system, electoral strategies and coalition tactics (Sitter 2001; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008).

The impact of European integration on party systems, strategies and programs has also been studied in order to assess the "Europeanisation" of political competition, understood as the inclusion of European issues in domestic politics (Radaelli 2001; Ladrech 2002). Authors reach different conclusions depending on their theoretical framework: a Sartorian approach shows that this impact has been limited in terms of format and mechanisms of party systems (Mair 2000; Haughton 2009), whereas a extensive definition of political cleavages tends to suggest that European issues have altered political conflicts and replaced old fault lines with new ones (Fuchs et al. 2009).

These two lines of thought have yet shown their limits in terms of explanations for the logics of party positions on Europe (Neumayer 2008). Theoreticians of Euroscepticism convincingly argue that there is a marked tendency for Eurosceptic parties to be located on the periphery of party politics, and that "party strategy matters" in EU positions. Yet a strict focus on parties which are critical of the EU to the detriment of 'pro-European' parties gives an incomplete picture of the Europeanization of political competition which is especially problematic in the CECs. Because political systems were reshaped in the early 1990s, at a time when the idea of joining the EU was prominent on the agenda of the new governments, European issues played a role in the creation of *all* political identities. Although the analysis of "Europeanization" of political competition is more comprehensive in its empirical focus, many studies remain quite descriptive and consider the position of each party in an isolated way from its competitors' - as if political organisations were free to frame their discourse on Europe in a political vacuum, and not in highly competitive political fields.

A relational conception of party positions on European integration not only helps understand why parties often take ambiguous positions, but it provides a more comprehensive analysis of the emergence of national "patterns" of political discourse on European integration in the CECs. This approach breaks with the characterization of parties according to broad ideological categories such as "liberalism" or "conservatism," which posits that parties reflect pre-existing social interests. It rests on the two following assumptions: parties do not automatically emanate from the interests they claim to defend, these interests are shaped by political actors who define them in such a way as to appear like the "natural" representative of

social groups; politics is essentially a competition to impose one's "representations of the world" in order to legitimate certain lines of division within the political field (Bourdieu 1981). Although Communist societies were internally differentiated, CEC politicians redefined the main social and political lines of division after 1989 in order to accumulate political capital (legitimacy, government positions and various forms of support from citizens such as votes, party members, and so forth). In the 1990s, references to European integration allowed political leaders to shape and reshape political lines of division, and to classify themselves - and their rivals - along those lines. European integration, as a symbol of a break with the past in the geopolitical, political, social and economic spheres, was a major political resource that various actors used in order to build party identities and disqualify competitors. This is the reason why there is no straightforward relationship between general party ideology and party position on Europe: politicians used European issues as a tool for political competition and ideological differentiation, according to their position in national party politics.

Moreover, the development of pre-accession blurred the relationship between party identities and positions on EU integration. Because supporting EU integration was a condition to participate in politics after 1989, a pro-European stance was a *normative theme,* that is, a general rule that determined the behaviour of legitimate political actors (Bailey 1969). Mainstream political parties could not "cross the line" and criticize the EU as such, for fear of being stigmatised as "Eurosceptic". They created new political categories, such as "Eurorealism," that would give a more positive image of themselves. But the structure of political games changed during the pre-accession process. After the opening of the accession negotiations in 1998, domestic policies were increasingly influenced by EU rules. This shift from foreign policy issues to concrete socio-economic controversies increased the value of European issues as a source of political capital, because EU accession was framed more directly according to the interests of electoral constituencies. Widespread "Eurorealism" was the result of this tension between a necessary *collusion* between parties, which moderated their criticisms in order to appear legitimate political actors, and the *instrumentalisation* of EU issues to gain electoral support at the expense of competitors. Saying "yes, but" to accession to the EU became a *pragmatic rule* of the game during the late 1990s, that is, a set of rules of a lesser importance that actors could freely define and redefine, without any risk of exclusion from political competitions (Neumayer 2006).

This tension between collusion and instrumentalisation defines how far parties can go in their criticism of European integration without being sanctioned. It sets the limits for the framing of European integration in each national political system, in a similar way as the "incitation" and the "barrier" effects distinguished by Harmsen (Harmsen 2005). National patterns of discourses on European integration thus emerge, shaped by the "fit" between national and European symbols on the one hand, and the "place" of the country in Europe on the other hand (Harmsen 2008). Czech politicians framed their (dis)approval of European integration by using references and political fault lines which are relevant for their domestic competitors and for the general public. Some of these lines of division concern the assessment of the communist past while others build on older symbolic and political references embedded in the Czech history. European issues are thus transferred and incorporated in national political codes.

This chapter is structured as follows. After providing some background information on the pattern of the European debate in the Czech Lands since 1989 and the specific context of the last European elections, I will show to what extent the framing of party positions on Europe still built on the pre-accession period in June 2009 (I). These positions define a vocal Eurosceptic discourse focused on the "promotion of national interests" and the "fight against the EU's bureaucracy and democratic deficit", and a timid pro-European discourse based on the promotion of the "European social market economy" and a vision of the EU as "a tool for peace and prosperity". Interestingly enough, a strong capillarity between political families allows parties to borrow these themes from each other across ideological lines (II).

## I. EUROPEAN ISSUES IN CZECH POLITICS: 1989-2009

After five years of EU membership, although the Czech government had just held the presidency of the EU Council and Czech politicians had fought for almost two years over the Lisbon Treaty, the arguments that had been used to discuss European integration as a candidate country were still prominent in the political discourse of the main political parties in June 2009. This clear continuity, combined with a strong domestic focus, characterized a short electoral campaign considered by most politicians as a test before the upcoming general elections.

### 1. European discourse in the Czech Republic since 1989

Since the early 1990s, European issues have been used to define domestic political lines of division along two dimensions in the Czech Republic: as a tool for inclusion and exclusion from political competition; as a source of distinction between *mainstream* political actors in inter and intra-party competitions.

1.1. Because European integration was a symbol for peace, prosperity and democracy, political parties have been classified as legitimate or illegitimate political actors based on their attitude towards the EU in the early 1990s. This distinction was based on two partially overlapping principles of exclusion: the association with the communist regime and the stigmatisation as a *protest party*.

Politicians associated with the communist regimes were distinguished from politicians from the former dissidence or from newly established political parties, according to their attitude towards European issues. Initially, the former Czech ruling party, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), was not in favour of a quick association, not to mention integration in the EU. But its leaders could not bear the cost of an anti-European position that would have highlighted their connection with the former regime. As a result, they were very vague about relations with the EU and more vocal in their criticism of NATO, during the first free election in 1990. Later on, former communist parties framed their European positions depending on their conversion strategy. Support for European integration, as a sign of a break with the past and support for democracy and the market economy, was a major tool in the construction of a "social democratic" identity for the former Polish and the Hungarian ruling parties. The KSČM, which did not follow the path to social democracy, rejected EU accession on the ground that such an unequal partnership would "accelerate the domination of the Czech economy by foreign capital" and "increase social inequalities" (KSČM, 1996). Simultaneously the historical Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), which had been maintained in exile during communism, took a strong pro-European stance in order to redefine its identity, distinguish itself from KSČM and gain international recognition.

Far left and far right politicians had no reason to support accession to the EU, because such a position reinforced their rejection of post-communist transformations. In contrast, political actors willing to take part in governments needed to show some moderation on European issues in order as to be classified as "legitimate", as *mainstream*. The KSČM is a good example of such a shift. At the very end of the 1990s, when EU accession grew closer and the Czech Communists were excluded from power despite their good electoral results,

they adopted a "Eurorealist" position in an attempt to be recognised as a potential coalition partner for the ČSSD. But the Communist party, whose militants in their majority opposed accession, didn't take a clear stance on this issue. When asked whether they supported joining the EU, KSČM leaders replied that their decision would depend on a "thorough costs-benefits analysis". In 2003, when all opinion polls predicted a successful outcome for the accession referendum, Czech communists didn't give any instruction to their voters but announced that they would "accept the results of the referendum". Similarly, the 2004 European elections forced them to compete for positions in an institution that they criticized for its democratic deficit, for fear of being classified as *protest* parties. Presenting the elections as a "second referendum" on accession, promising their supporters that they would "change the EU from within to make it more social", KSČM politicians switched from *critical outsiders* to *critical insiders*. They used their tacit acceptance of EU membership and their good results at the European elections to claim a legitimacy to govern at home.

*1.2.European Issues as a Source of Distinction between Mainstream Political Actors*

After the fall of communism, parties that competed to be recognized as the only true representatives of "liberal," "conservative" or "social democratic" constituencies used their positions on European integration to disqualify their closest competitors. According to their emerging political identity, they accused their rivals either of being too flexible and "servile" towards the EU, or too tough and "nationalistic."

The "liberal-conservative" political identity of the Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS) was shaped, among other themes, by a critical opinion of European integration. Four points structured its analysis of European integration as of the mid-1990s: the defense of the nation state as the unique source of identity and sovereignty; the need to protect national diversity from EU "standardization"; the promotion of economic freedom against EU "excessive interventions"; the criticism of the EU's "democratic deficit" (Klaus 2001). For example, during the 2004 European campaign, Václav Klaus, the founder and honorary chairman of ODS, denounced the "fetishisation" of the EU, criticized the "dissolution of the nation-states between Brussels and the regions" and predicted that the country would "lose its independence" after accession (Klaus 2004).

"Eurorealist" positions are deeply rooted in the ODS. Its leaders defend a "realist" conception of international relations based on the balance of power among nation states, free trade and intergovernmental cooperation. They have increasingly focused on the notion of

"national interests" and "democratic deficit" since the late 1990s. In a speech given at the party's Congress in 2001, its vice-president Jan Zahradil defined the ODS as a "right-wing, liberal and conservative" party. He also said that it was a "national" party and added that "national interests are not equal to nationalism or to an archaic concept from the 19th century. National interests are a reality in today's Europe. We know how to define them, hence we know how to protect them" (Zahradil 2001). In a more detailed presentation of the Civic Democrats' conception of European integration, Zahradil glorified "national democratic traditions" developed in the past by major figures of the First Czechoslovak Republic like Palacký, Havlíček and Masaryk. He claimed that the Czech conception of democracy was the only "authentic" one and warned the EU against "fatal" visions of Europe such as "Habsburg nostalgia, German federalism or pan-Europeanism" (Adrián et al. 2001). This idealized conception of democracy has strongly influenced the Czech debate on the EU's "democratic deficit".

Far from being monolithic entities, political parties are collections of individuals, groups and coalitions that hold partly divergent views and interests. Party positions on European integration are also ambiguous and shifting because of internal divisions due to personal histories, different ideological preferences and power struggles. For example, changes in the internal balance between party currents over time caused softening or sharpening of criticism of EU integration in the ODS before and after 2004. The party's increasing stress on "national interests" after 1999 resulted from several factors. The most "Eurorealist" current, around Václav Klaus and Jan Zahradil, was strengthened by a split that led to the creation of a new liberal party, the Freedom Union (US), by the pro-European members of ODS in February 1998. In addition, the accession negotiations started a month later and the Civic Democrats lost power after the legislative elections in June that year. Asserting Eurorealist positions served several purposes: not only did it contribute to a broad ideological shift towards a "more conservative-national direction", but it also helped unite the new ODS around its leaders and counteract "weak party institutionalisation" (Hanley 2004). Denouncing the European policy of the ruling Social Democratic party allowed the ODS to exist in the political sphere and compete with pro-integration opposition parties such as US. Yet this sharply critical current was weakened after Klaus became President of the Republic in February 2003 and Zahradil was elected MEP in June 2004. A more moderate group around the new leader of the party, Mirek Topolánek, got the opportunity to frame a milder discourse on European issues - although Václav Klaus and Jan Zahradil also used their new

functions to express strong criticisms of the euro, the European Constitutional Treaty and the proposed EU budget for 2007-2013 (Neumayer 2006).

## 2. Themes and results of the 2009 election campaign

The European elections were dominated in the Czech Republic by domestic issues and negative campaigns at the expense of discussions on EU policies or the future of European integration. Concern with the recession clearly prevailed in electoral manifestos and the public sphere, and even the fate of the Lisbon Treaty was not a major topic of debate during the campaign.

In June 2009, the Czech Republic had been governed for six months by an interim government run by the former head of the Czech Statistical Office, Jan Fischer. The political situation had been complicated since the June 2006 general elections, which had resulted in a stalemate between the left (Social Democrats and Communists) and the right and its allies (Civic Democrats, Christian Democrats, Greens), both of them controlling 100 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The ODS entered into an awkward coalition government with the Greens and the Christian Democrats in January 2007. Growing internal struggles appeared in 2008 in the Green Party and in the ODS, whose leader Mirek Topolánek was challenged on several points including the lengthy ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Civic Democratic politicians in both Chambers of Parliament were divided between a "pragmatic" wing around Topolánek, who criticized the Lisbon treaty while supporting its ratification in order to facilitate the upcoming Czech presidency in the first half of 2009, and the more radical wing around Václav Klaus, who fully rejected the Treaty[1]. A group of ODS senators sent the Lisbon Treaty draft to the Czech Constitutional Court in April 2008 in order to examine its accordance with the Czech Constitution. After the Court gave a green light to its ratification in November 2008, the Treaty was finally approved in February 2009 by the lower Chamber and in May 2009 by the Senate. Following the approval of the Lisbon Treaty by the Irish electorate on October 2nd 2009 Klaus finally gave its assent to the text on November, 3rd 2009. According to European law, the Lisbon Treaty came into force on the first day of the

[1] According to the Czech Constitution, European treaties need to be ratified by both chambers of the Parliament and then signed by the President of the Republic before they can enter into force. Václav Klaus, who was opposed to the Lisbon Treaty, welcomed the negative referendum in Ireland in June 2008, in which he saw a good reason to stop the ratification process in the Czech Republic. After the Irish government decided to hold a second referendum in October 2009, Klaus announced that he would wait for the results of this second referendum before he signed the Lisbon Treaty.

month following the deposition of the Czech instrument of ratification with the government of Italy, which was December 1st 2009.

Meanwhile, a successful no-confidence vote by the Social Democrats, the Communists and four "renegades" from the ODS and the Greens resulted in the fall of the Topolánek cabinet on March 24th, 2009. The former coalition parties and the ČSSD agreed to hold early elections in October 2009. The Fischer interim government obtained the support of the House of Deputies on June 7th 2009, just one day after the European elections. This is the reason why the election campaign was mainly seen by political parties as a way of testing their strength in the run up to the general elections.

The ODS campaign was based upon a contrast between the Civic Democrats as a party "offering solutions" and the Social Democrats as a party representing a non-specified "threat". Its motto was "Solution instead of fear" and its volunteers, organised in a "Blue Team" (thus named to recall the colour symbolically associated with ODS) created a website called "The ČSSD against you". The Social Democrats clearly stated that the European elections were a litmus test before the upcoming legislative elections. They accordingly focused their European campaign on the national economy, the welfare state, health care and pension reform. The domestic and negative dimension of the ČSSD campaign can be illustrated by its use of billboards, including one representing a man holding a sign that said "Prevent the return of the ODS". The Social Democrats also created a fake classified ad with a picture of an old and damaged bicycle that said "Looking to swap a bicycle (men's) for the election program of ODS in the European elections – NB: an exchange of equals". By comparison, the Communist party KSČM did not lead a very active campaign and mainly distributed leaflets without organizing major rallies. The smaller parties which had been part of the Topolánek government, the Greens and the Christian-Democrats, were in turmoil when the campaign began in May 2009 and failed to attract voters' attention.

Several parties without parliamentary representation created some expectations, especially three newly created Eurosceptic formations: Libertas, the Party of Free Citizens (SSO) and the "Sovereignty" (S) party. The Libertas movement was led by the MEP from the Independence/Democracy Group Vladimir Železný and two former ODS members. Its campaign was based on an opposition between European integration and national interests. The SSO, founded in January 2009 by a former protégé of Václav Klaus, proved unable to attract major politicians or get sufficient funds and developed a low-key campaign based on

an opposition to the EU's current trajectory. Finally, the new party "S" created in April 2009 to support the candidacy of the Eurosceptic MEP Jana Bobošiková based its campaign on the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty but failed to attract attention until the very end of the campaign.

Although these elections could be considered as "second order elections" given their strong domestic content and their low turnout, their results contradict one of the key elements of Reif and Schmitt's thesis, i.e. the fact that minor, new protest parties gain a large share of the votes (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Only 4 out of 33 competing political organisations gained representation in the EP and all the successful parties have been continuously represented in both Chambers of the Parliament since the early 1990s.

**European Election Results in the Czech Republic 2004/2009**

| | **2004** Turnout : 28,32% | | **2009** Turnout : 28,22% | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PARTY | Votes % | MEP | Votes % | MEP |
| ODS | 30.04 | 9 | 31.45 | 9 |
| ČSSD | 8.78 | 2 | 22.39 | 7 |
| KSČM | 20.26 | 6 | 14.18 | 4 |
| KDU-ČSL | 9.57 | 2 | 7.65 | 2 |
| SNK-ED | 11.02 | 3 | did not run | / |
| Independents | 8.18 | 2 | did not run | / |

Source: www.volby.cz.

NB: Due to the 2007 enlargement to Romania and Bulgaria, the number of Czech MEPs decreased from 24 in 2004 to 22 in 2009.

## II. PARTY DISCOURSES ON EUROPE

One should not overestimate the importance of the debates on European issues for Czech voters. The low turnout, the rare mentions of the Lisbon Treaty in manifestos, the failure of parties specifically created for these elections and the success of the most domestic-

oriented parties, all point to the low level of attention paid to "discussions about Europe". Yet these discussions are interesting because they illustrate how "Europe" has been integrated into the main fault lines of the Czech political field and how symbols, references and catchphrases travel from one party to the other to shape a vocal Eurosceptic discourse, with distinct "liberal" and "social" forms, and a more timid pro-European orientation with different "social democrat", "green" and "christian democrat" versions.

**1. Two types of Euroscepticism**

In the Czech Republic, the conservative-liberal party ODS and the Communist party KSČM are the major political organisations expressing Eurosceptic positions. Their stances on European integration have common points as far as the EU's political project is concerned: both criticize its "democratic deficit", its tendency to overstep its competences and the domination of big member states over smaller ones. Their opinions widely differ, however, on the socio-economic level: the ODS considers the EU as "overregulated" whereas the KSČM views it as "too liberal" and as a threat to the national welfare system. Each party also favours a different option for the future development of the European Union.

Three themes were prominent in the ODS manifesto in 2009 (ODS 2009): an attempt to reactivate a social division over the communist past, a strong focus on the democratic shortcomings of the EU and the promotion of "Czech interests". Simultaneously, the manifesto tried to derive legitimacy from the European level of government by underlining the successes of the Czech Presidency of the European Council and by stressing the work done by Civic Democratic MEPs since 2004.

The manifesto started with an introduction by the party leader Mirek Topolánek, who drew a distinction between "freedom and responsibility" and "true Europeaness" on the one hand (i.e. ODS), and "the old regime and populism" and "looking to the East" (i.e. KSČM and ČSSD) on the other hand. Jan Zahradil then criticized the "socialist-communist opposition" for being irresponsible and censuring the government in the middle of the Czech Presidency, thus depriving the country of a unique opportunity to "mark the history of European integration, enhance its international prestige and show its organizational and negotiation skills". Zahradil also claimed that the ČSSD did not have a real European programme and was merely using the programme of the Party of the European Socialists (PES), thus "disregarding Czech interests". He established an analogy between this "internationalist" viewpoint and the socialist time, when "foreign interest and ideologies" governed Czechoslovakia.

The text presented the Civic Democrats, on the contrary, as the true defenders of the "interests of this country and its citizens": "We always consider all the steps and measures that are prepared at the European level through this prism. We aren't systematic grumblers, we want to make deals and we look for common points and common denominators with the other EU members. But we don't let anyone dictate anything to us and we don't let ourselves be pushed around. No supranational political organisation will ever be more important for us than our commitment to our country and to you – our voters. This is the main element that distinguishes us from the ČSSD". Zahradil's introduction also insisted on the active presence of ODS MEPs in the European Parliament and on their distinctive opinions on many issues. It ended by the phrase "one doesn't need to be loved, one needs to be respected". This rhetoric of the national interest as opposed to "supranational fractions" was meant to underline that the ODS was dedicated to gain respect from bigger delegations in the EP.

The manifesto then provided readers with a general conception of European integration under the heading "ODS and European policy: sober, practical and realistic" which further stressed that European integration was not an end in itself but a tool for protecting "Czech national interests". It defended a predominantly economic conception of European integration aimed at helping European countries deal with globalization. The programme called for a new development for the EU. It claimed that the "original model of the European Community" has used all its potential in the enlarged Union because its "rhetoric of the post-war federalist spirit" competed with the biggest member states' attempt to "establish a new internal hierarchy". This is the reason why the latter strongly defended the Lisbon Treaty which allows them to "monopolize European integration for their own national interests". The internal divisions of the ODS over this Treaty prevented the manifesto from being more specific regarding its ratification in the Czech Republic.

The ODS further distinguished two paths for the future of the European Union: "building a regional bloc with the biggest amount of legal, political and economic unity – a sort of 'Europe-country'" on the one hand, and "a flexible, economically open and expanding entity, leading to the concept of 'flexible' or 'variable' integration" on the other hand. The first option was deemed "contrary to Czech national interests" and the ODS committed itself to looking for an alternative model of development for the EU. Finally two strategic priorities were distinguished: looking for the "national interest" when it is impossible to agree on the European level or when a European solution would be inefficient (in the fight against

economic recession or in the social sphere for example); building a "strong Europe" in the sectors when individual states are not sufficient (in energy policy and security for example).

The core of the manifesto, under the motto "Solutions instead of fear", was organised in five parts. The first four items focused on the domestic level and presented "solutions" against the economic crisis. The final part only dealt with "Solutions for the Czech Republic in the EU". It underlined again the results of the Czech Presidency of the EU Council in the economic spheres and described the activities of the Civic Democratic MEPs since 2004, stressing than they voted in an autonomous way within the EPP thanks to their own voting list. This section ended with a quantitative analysis of the activities of these MEPs (interpellations of the European Commission, written resolutions and speeches during plenary sessions) intended to give the impression of dedicated and serious representatives. The manifesto then recalled ODS' plan to create a new "Eurorealist" fraction with the British conservatives by splitting from the EPP, which was criticized for its "Eurofederalist" tendencies and its "silent great coalition" with the PES.

Although the KSČM used the same catchphrases as the ODS, such as "democratic deficit" and "inequalities between member states", its emphasis was much more on economic issues. It also advocated reinforcing the European Parliament, whereas the ODS barely mentioned this institution. The Communists' short manifesto (KSČM 2009a) was mainly oriented towards a criticism of neo-liberal economy presented as the reason for the current recession. This leaflet was divided in two sections. The first one, entitled "The first five steps against the crisis", explained how the KSČM intended to fight the economic and social crisis at the national level. The second section showed pictures of the current MEPs from KSČM under the title "Let's change our future in Europe – "The Blue chance" [ODS] deepens the crisis, the "Orange hope" [ČSSD] does not solve it". These representatives explained what their priorities had been in the Assembly but their general tone was quite negative, as they presented themselves as the best defenders of theirs voters' interests and of the Czech position in the EU.

A more detailed manifesto, entitled "Public election program of the KSČM in the 2009 European elections", promoted the general idea of cooperation while criticizing the current state of the EU (KSČM 2009b). The manifesto first defended "a Europe of Certainty" in economic and financial terms while opposing "the aggressive politics of NATO which starts

local wars in the interest of the USA". It then shaped an economic and social model for Europe based on several elements: "a Europe without barriers", "Europe as a place for a successful life" and "a Europe of economic prosperity and stability". All these priorities were however to be achieved at the national level of government, where the KSČM listed the policy tools generally favoured by the left, such as state support to employment; investments in education, health care, culture and infrastructures; measures against tax or salary dumping; a large regulation of the economy.

The last three items of the programme were more critical of the European Union and denounced its democratic deficit and lack of social policy. First, the KSČM advocated "a Europe as a place for democratic dialogue" with a true equality of rights for citizens and member states and "direct democracy and reinforced competencies for the European Parliament and national parliaments instead of a non-controlled bureaucracy". Secondly, it expressed pacifist views and promoted "a system of collective security instead of military blocs". The last part of the manifesto recapitulated in a radical way the arguments which had been expressed earlier in the text. The KSČM opposed "the neo-liberal economic policy of the EU which worsens the living standards of citizens and excludes social issues from the process of deepening European integration". It also criticized the "inequalities between member states and the domination of big powers", the "growing bureaucracy, absurd norms, opaque decision-making system in the EU organs" as well as the "discrimination against new member states, including the Czech Republic in the Common Agricultural Policy, the free movement of workers or the use of EU funding". The KSČM reiterated its opposition to the participation in NATO operations and the presence of "foreign armed forces" on the Czech territory[2]. Contrary to the other Czech parties, the KSČM did not mention its membership in the group "European United Left" in the European Parliament, although one of its MEPs was its vice-president. The manifesto mentioned only that "the KSČM is not alone in Europe" and that it aimed at "uniting left-wing forces not only in the EU but in the whole of Europe".

## 2. Timid pro-European stances

The manifestos of the Social Democrats, the Christian Democrats and the Greens described the positive aspects of European integration, recalled that it brought "peace and

[2] An allusion to the project of the American anti-missile shield supported by the ODS but rejected by the other political parties and the majority of the Czech population.

prosperity" and praised its "social market economy". Each party however gave a slightly different tone to these notions – the ČSSD being the least enthusiastic of the three.

The Social Democrats' programme was focused on the economic and financial crisis, which it blamed on the right-wing parties. Their fifty-page long manifesto was organised in three sections: the programme of the ČSSD in the European elections, entitled "Certainty for the people, hope for Europe"; "the Programme of the ČSSD against the crisis" which dealt exclusively with domestic economic and social policies; and the manifesto of the PSE, "People First: a New Direction for Europe" (ČSSD 2009a). The party tried to draw legitimacy from its membership in the PSE because the small number of Czech Social Democratic MEPs prevented it from presenting their activities in the EP as crucial. Its programme offered very little analysis of the political dimension of European integration and did not mention the Lisbon Treaty.

In his introduction to the manifesto, the leader of ČSSD Jiří Paroubek connected the European elections with the economic crisis and stressed their domestic dimension: "Our program "Certainty" is made for the whole year 2009. This is the reason why it contains our "Program against the crisis". Contrary to the current Czech right-wing government, we have prepared a solution which will bring certainty to the Czech citizens in these difficult times [...]. This is the reason why 2009 will be the second round in the referendum on Mirek Topolánek's government and its experiments". The ČSSD presented itself as a respected and active member of the PES and interpreted the Civic Democrats' plan to split from the EPP as a sign that "the Czech right-wing government, based on corruption, has no authority at home or abroad". The key part of the manifesto was not however related to European issues but to a criticism of the "neo-liberal politics" of the Czech right. Although the manifesto talked about the "European social model" implemented by socialist parties all over Europe, criticized the foreign right-wing leaders "Sarkozy, Bush, Berlusconi or Barroso" and claimed that "the economic crisis increases the significance of European action", its core was a rejection of the Topolánek government enriched by some references to European issues.

The main notion used by the ČSSD in the shorter version of its manifesto was "Certainty", which was developed along five lines (ČSSD 2009b). The first item, "Certainty for the People", expressed a somewhat ambiguous commitment to European integration presented as a necessary process rather than an exciting project. It used the catchphrase of the "national interests" when it claimed that "the globalized economy necessitates a common

European policy. Our country must not only be heard in the EU, but it must also take part in the positive formulation of the European Union. It is the only way for us not to lose our national identity and our capacity to promote our national interests". The second and third items, focused on "Equality" and "a Healthy Economy", barely mentioned European issues except for a quick reference to "the European social model enriched by a reasonable dimension of environmental protection" and the need to coordinate policies in some economic sectors like energy and finance. The ČSSD manifesto then used a common Eurosceptic theme when it expressed its "decided opposition to European bureaucracy. The European Union is here for the citizens of its member states, not for some arrogant civil servants". The next element, dealing with "Freedom and Security", was more positive when it recalled that "Europe is today one of the freest places in the world and the centre of this freedom is the European Union. [...] We promise that we will protect our common freedom in Europe like we protect our national interest and identity. Being Czech in a free and secure Europe is the fulfilment of the dream of many generations before us". The text then called for "a bigger role for the EU in international security", a "fair common immigration policy" and recalled that the ČSSD would "respect the will of the majority of our citizens as regards the installation of American radar on our territory". The last part of the manifesto, concerning "Solidarity", touched upon the European dimension only marginally when it mentioned that the goals of ČSSD were to ensure that "our salaries, pensions and allowances got closer to the old EU member states" and to protect the "social cohesion [that] Brussels and the Czech right want to take away from us".

In their manifesto, the Christian Democratic party (KDU-ČSL) promoted conservative values like anticommunism, the defence of family and the fight against crime, as well as socially-oriented economic policies at the basis of a "social market economy which achieves a balance between free market and social sensitivity" (KDU-ČSL 2009). Contrary to the majority of Czech parties, they refrained from any criticism of the EU and from using the expressions "national interests" or "bureaucracy". They also took a distinctive stance on the issue of Turkey's membership in the EU by clearly opposing it.

The programme of the Christian Democrats stressed a close ideological proximity with the idea of united Europe:

> "Christian politicians were at the origin of the project of European integration. The idea of a united Europe was based on values such as freedom conditioned by responsibility, respect for the dignity of every human being and human rights,

> solidarity with those who need it and peaceful solutions to conflicts. These enabled all EU member states to live for more than 50 years in peace, security and prosperity".

This warm support to European integration was reaffirmed when the party proudly recalled that "only the KDU-ČSL can guarantee that it has been a full member of the biggest Christian-democratic group, the European People's Party, since 1996". Without naming names, the text also attacked Czech parties that are more critical of European integration: "Euro-pessimists abuse the crisis to scare the citizens with "the foreign and bureaucratic Brussels" in order to legitimize their attempts to further weaken the European Union. We are on the contrary committed to modernize the European Union in order to protect most effectively all European citizens from the negative consequences of globalization". The manifesto also claimed that Europe was experiencing a "crisis of values" that required a European action:

> "We are threatened by international terrorism and organized crime. For reasons of convenience, a growing number of people don't want to have children and Europe gets older and dies off. Climate change and global warming require a new respect towards natural resources. We can solve these global problems only together, that is in the European Union".

After stating this conservative pro-EU orientation, the KDU-ČSL developed six main elements in its programme. The first dimension concerned economic issues, where the manifesto called for better financial regulations and an increased intervention of the state in the economy in order to support employment, education and research. Interestingly enough, the text mentioned the necessity to "set a precise date to adopt the euro, which we see as a way to increased monetary and economic stability". It also used a moderate tone to present the demand for equal rights that the other Czech parties put forward in a more negative way, asking for example for "free movement of workers and services in an EU without barriers". The second element, "Europe as a safe place for a happy and peaceful life" briefly mentioned the "modernization of the European social model by increasing the share of individual responsibility and strengthening solidarity with those who really need it". It then focused in details on the fight against crime and illegal migration. Two other parts of the manifesto dealt with the protection of families, children and consumers. Quick references were made to the reform of CAP or the coordination of the European social systems, but these issues were mainly to be tackled at the national level.

The European dimension was more prominent in the chapter on "the fight against global warming", where the KDU-ČSL advocated establishing a common energy policy and

developing green energies at the EU level in order to diminish Western dependency on Russia. The last part of the manifesto, "A united Europe as a strong world actor", pleaded for an increased coordination of EU aid, developing the European security and defence policy in "a strategic agreement with the United States" and reinforcing the European Neighbourhood Policy. Attention was paid to promoting human rights abroad and putting pressure on communist authoritarian regimes. Contrary to all the other Czech political parties, the KDU-ČSL clearly rejected the enlargement of the EU to Turkey and suggested a form of "privileged partnership":

> "We consider the full membership of such a big country, so different in terms of culture and values, as a possible risk from the point of view of building and strengthening a European identity. The EU could not fully absorb such a vast country and this could put its whole existence in jeopardy! [...] The frontiers of the EU end at the borders with Turkey".

The Greens presented their voters with a programme, "A green way out of the crisis", that was equally built on a clear pro-European attitude and on the traditional features of ecological parties (Strana zelených 2009). The manifesto claimed that the seriousness of the current economic crisis called for a new model of development promoted by the Greens all over Europe, based on restructuration of industry, "green jobs" and public support to "science, research, education and export". The distinctive feature of the Greens' programme was its systematic references to the European level of decision-making and to concrete proposals that the Green MEPs would make in the European Parliament. It first claimed that "Europe leads the way in the world as regards the protection of the environment. This trend dates back to the time when the Greens established themselves in European politics". The manifesto then gave a long list of priorities and explained what could be done at the European level in environmental issues; in the economic sector; in the social sphere; in education and research; in the promotion of human rights all over the world.

The Green party also called itself "the only genuinely pro-European Czech political force" and took very clear positions on controversial issues such as the European Security and Defence Policy, the Lisbon Treaty and the powers of European institutions. A strong and detailed support was given to the Lisbon Treaty, presented as "allowing a better coordination of the activities of the European Commission and the EU Council" and reforming the functioning of the EU "according to new, more democratic and more efficient rules [thanks

to] a new voting system in the Council and a clear reinforcement of the powers of the European Parliament" including "in the EU foreign policy". The Greens criticized the Czech right for its "guarded" position on European integration and the left for "putting its own interests ahead of the interests of the country" by ousting the government in the middle of the first Czech presidency of the EU Council. They also stressed that the Green party was the fifth political group in the European parliament and that its deputies took the Assembly seriously – not as a place where one "gives vain talks or rests" or "looks for items for a domestic political skirmish", but as a venue to "look for solutions to Europe-wide issues, which also have a far-reaching impact on the citizens of the Czech Republic". Finally, the Greens committed themselves to "transparency" and pledged to give public accounts of their relations with lobbyists.

## CONCLUSION

Two main reasons account for the relative stability of the Czech pattern of discourse on European integration since 1989. In Central Europe as a whole, European issues were major sources of political capital that allowed political parties to create their identities and disqualify their competitors after the fall of communism. . Because of the normative dimension of European integration, seen as a symbol of the break with communism, attitudes towards Europe still help distinguish pro-European *mainstream* parties from anti-European *protest* parties. This distinction has however become more ambiguous during the pre-accession period as the value of European issues in domestic political competition has increased, giving way to "Eurorealist" positions and to widespread criticism of specific EU policies.

Second, considerations of "fit" and "place" also explain the contours and the stability of this discursive pattern. The partial "fit" between the European institutional set-up and the strong value attached to a strict definition of the notion of "democracy" inherited from the First Czechoslovak Republic makes the criticism of the "democratic deficit" of the EU particularly relevant in the national political field. The "place" of the country in the European Union also plays an important role both in a geographical (as a medium sized country) and a historical (as a new member state with a recent history of foreign domination) sense of the word, as it fuels demands for equal rights and a fear of domination by more influential countries. In this respect, the vast majority of Czech manifestos stressed that the New

Member States were treated poorly in financial and economic terms and demanded that the EU put an end to unfavourable derogations in the CAP and the free movement of workers. Although the "place of Europe in the Czech Republic" was not very prominent in 2009, as was shown by the very domestic focus of the electoral campaign, there was symmetrically a widespread fear that the "place of the Czech Republic in Europe" is not prominent enough. Whether the longer term evolution of Czech discourses, post-membership, leads to the development of a more serene relation with the EU remains a question for future research. But recent developments in Czech politics since the June 2009 European elections, such as the constitution of an ODS-led coalition government and repeated critical statements on EU policy by President Klaus, tend to suggest that the Czech position as one of the "reluctant member states" of the EU is likely to last.

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